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SUBJECT: NO CELEBRATIONS IN ZAMFARA: REPORTS INACCURATE

REF: (A) ABUJA (B) ABUJA 2290 (C) ABUJA 2331

1. Summary: Post has investigated the story reported by a BBC stringer in Gusau, capital of Zamfara State, that there were celebrations there following the September 11 attack on the U.S. All sources indicate that this story was exaggerated. Reports of unrest in Kano on Friday, September 14, also appear to have been fabricated, according to reports from private and official sources there. This is a stressful time in Nigeria, independent of events in the U.S. At times like this, Nigerian "news" reports can unfortunately be intended more than ever to sell newspapers--through marketing ethnic and religious prejudice--than to report objective facts. Unfortunately, irresponsible journalism can have severe repercussions, in Nigeria and elsewhere. End Summary.

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Zamfara  
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2. Poloff contacted the (Christian) Commissioner of Police in Gusau, Aaron Ibiyoye, on September 12, and he reported that there had been no demonstrations whatsoever in Gusau on the 11th, adding that most people in Gusau had been preparing for the arrival of President Obasanjo on the 13th. Political Specialist contacted two long-term stringers in Zamfara, Sani Abdullahi Tsafe (VOA) and Umaru Waziri (Reuters), to verify the "jubilation" story. They were both angry about the BBC story, and reported that their BBC colleague could not provide a source, or even a location for his story. They added that the BBC stringer, Ibrahim Dosara, was a recent hire who, in reporting this story without adequate investigation, failed to maintain proper standards of journalistic professionalism. No private citizen contacted by Post could confirm the report. Unfortunately, the damage has been done, and Zamfara state has now been registered in the U.S. consciousness--and that of the rest of the world--as one of a very few places where the attacks of September 11 were publicly celebrated.

3. Officials in Government House, Gusau, issued a press release from Governor Ahmed Sani condemning the terrorist attacks and denying any demonstrations in support of the violence on September 11. They indicated that the Governor would have responded earlier but for President Obasanjo's all-consuming, first visit to Zamfara on September 13-14. Alhaji Mohammed Bello Umar, Permanent Secretary for Zamfara State Government, called on Charge on September 19 to deliver a letter and a personal message of condolence from Governor Ahmed Sani. Umar mentioned that the Governor was very upset about the reports in the press. He added that the BBC stringer, Dosara, had disavowed sending in a story, saying that he responded to a telephone call by BBC, which he claimed then distorted what he said. (Comment: While some radical Muslims in the North certainly may have been pleased by the attacks, that is a long way from a public demonstration, which is what BBC reported and some other media picked up. Because of Zamfara's notoriety as the first state to adopt criminal Shari'a, many Nigerians believe the reports and dismiss the Government's denials. End Comment.)

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Kano/Aba  
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4. Embassy contacts in Kano have denied that there was unrest there on Friday, September 14. There were rumors of violence, and more rumors of Muslims "jubiling" in Kano over the September 11 attack on the U.S. These rumors were widely reported in the Lagos media, and almost universally received as the truth in Southern Nigeria where the media and population are predisposed to believing the worst about Northerners, especially Hausa who happen to be Muslim. The only confirmed violent incident in Kano was the burning of a residence being used as a church in Shagari Quarters on September 10. According to the Commissioner of Police, this resulted from a long-term conflict between neighbors turning

violent--and does not appear to have been a response either to events in the U.S. or violence in Jos (REF B). Governor Kwankwaso himself castigated journalists assembled in Kano to accompany Minister of Information Jerry Gana. He reportedly asked them, "Did you see smoke coming from the city? Did you see violence? Then why did you write this?" He exhorted them to practice responsible journalism, rather than ratcheting up ethnic tensions with falsehoods calculated to sell newspapers. Investigations by ConGen Lagos into reports of violence in Aba, Abia State, proved that they were equally fictitious. (Note: Reprisal attacks in Aba following the February 2000 riots in Kaduna reportedly resulted in over 500 Hausa deaths there. End Note)

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Abuja

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15. Rumors that reprisal violence would erupt in Abuja over the September 15-16 weekend had Nigerian and AmCit residents of the Federal Capital Territory on edge. Approximately 25 missionaries who temporarily relocated from Plateau State to Abuja in the wake of the Jos killings were particularly concerned. GON security was much tighter than usual in Karmo, a sprawling unlicensed slum suburb of perhaps 250,000 souls, after rumors circulated that churches there would be attacked. Many Karmo residents are refugees from the Kaduna ethno-religious conflicts of February and May 2000, so there is ample dry tinder there.

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Kaduna

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16. The Sultan of Sokoto, sitting in Kaduna as chairman of the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), the leading Islamic religious organization in Nigeria, issued a strong statement condemning the terrorist attack against the U.S. This follows his statement, issued days after the attack, from Sokoto as the foremost Muslim traditional ruler in Nigeria in which he also condemned the attack. Reports on unrest in Kaduna over the weekend also appear to be without foundation.

17. Comment: Disregarding what has happened in the U.S., this has been a very difficult few weeks for Nigeria. Ganiyu Adams, the leader of the OPC's militant wing was arrested, sparking large protests by the OPC in Lagos. This raised tensions among Lagos' Hausa, who fear a repeat of last October's attacks in Ajegunle, in which over one hundred Hausa are reported to have died. Inter-ethnic violence in Jos on September 7-9 apparently has claimed more lives than last year's outbreaks in Kaduna, and Hausa refugees have left Jos and other parts of Plateau State in the thousands. Tensions are high, and rumors of planned reprisals by Muslims are a constant drumbeat--even in cities as far away as Abuja, Aba, and Lagos.

18. Comment Continued: In this context, irresponsible journalism--printing inciting rumors as facts--is akin to yelling "fire" in a crowded theater. The press in Nigeria has certainly undergone a renaissance since the return of democracy, with an astonishing number of dailies and weekly publications vying for readership. No-one would accuse it of being overly concerned with the truth, especially when a story can serve to reinforce established prejudices. While some media sources here are more reliable than others, publishers, reporters and those they interview view events through the prism of collectively held ethnic, regional and religious biases. This tendency is only exacerbated during times of crisis--when half-truths and falsehoods are most incendiary. This lack of professionalism has resulted in many stories that purvey the accepted myths of a particular group--in this case, the Southern myth that the Muslim Northerners are happy about what has happened in the U.S. While some Muslim extremists in Nigeria may be pleased by events, there simply is no evidence available to us of public celebrations or demonstrations. End Comment.  
Andrews